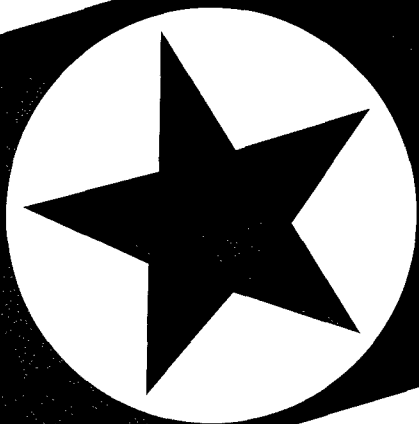


DEMYSTIFYING NORTH KOREA



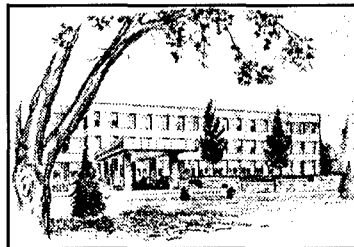
First in Series:  
**North Korea's  
Strategic Intentions**

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Andrew Scobell

Strategic Studies Institute **SSI**

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# **NORTH KOREA'S STRATEGIC INTENTIONS**

**Andrew Scobell**

**July 2005**

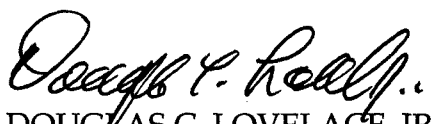
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## FOREWORD

North Korea poses a key challenge to the global community of states. Sometimes viewed as primarily a nuclear or proliferation challenge, Pyongyang actually presents the United States and other countries with multiple problems. As the 2005 *National Defense Strategy of the United States* notes, these challenges include “*traditional, irregular, and catastrophic*.” While each dimension of these threat capabilities are fairly clear and, with the exception of the third, readily documented, North Korea’s intentions are a much more controversial subject upon which specialists reach widely disparate conclusions.

In this monograph, Dr. Andrew Scobell examines the topic of Pyongyang’s strategic intentions. He first identifies a broad spectrum of expert views and distills this wisdom into three “packages” of possible strategic intentions. He then sets out to test which package appears to reflect actual North Korean policy. While he opines that one is more likely than the others, he concludes that it is impossible to say with certainty which package most closely resembles reality. As a result, he suggests that further probing of Pyongyang’s intentions is advisable.

As General Richard B. Myers stated before the House Armed Services Committee in February 2005, “The United States remains committed to maintaining peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula.” To this end, it is important to ensure that decisionmakers receive timely information and authoritative analysis on all aspects of North Korea. To meet this need, the Strategic Studies Institute is pleased to publish this monograph. Subsequent works will examine related topics, including North Korea’s political system, economy, armed forces, and foreign relations.

  
DOUGLAS C. LOVELACE, JR.  
Director  
Strategic Studies Institute

## SUMMARY

North Korea is probably the most mysterious and inaccessible country in the world today. Officially known as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), the Pyongyang regime is headed by perhaps the most mercurial and enigmatic political leader alive. The regime Kim leads is generally considered to be one of the most repressive in existence, with a vast gulag, a massive security apparatus, and an extensive system of controls. Despite the facade of a powerful party-state possessing an enormous military, the North Korean economy is in shambles, hundreds of thousands of people are living either as refugees in China or as displaced persons inside their own country, and millions have died from starvation and related diseases.

Topping the U.S. list of concerns about North Korea is its nuclear program; Washington is extremely alarmed not only that Pyongyang is developing a nuclear capability for its own use, but also proliferating nuclear material and technology. But the United States and other countries are also concerned about other weapons of mass destruction (WMD) North Korea possesses, as well as its ballistic missile program. Moreover, North Korea's conventional military forces are sizeable, with significant capabilities, and confront the armed forces of the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the United States across the Demilitarized Zone.

This monograph analyzes North Korea's strategic intentions and motivations. First, the views of leading analysts of North Korea regarding Pyongyang's strategic intentions are surveyed and examined. All of the analysts concur on a number of conclusions: (1) that the North Korean regime is not irrational; (2) this rationality leaves North Korea's leadership with a heightened sense of insecurity; (3) North Korea's rulers—or at least some of them—appear to be acutely aware of the reform dilemma they face.

This third conclusion is particularly significant. Because North Korea's leaders fear that they would be undermining their positions if the regime adopts comprehensive reforms, they are reluctant to move down this slippery slope. However, without significant reform, North Korea's leaders realize they are probably condemning their regime to the ash heap of history. Pyongyang is probably more

pursue unification by force or coercion. According to Pyongyang's propaganda, maintaining its military strength is the regime's foremost priority. This is born out by examinations of implemented policy, planning, and ruminations about the future.

The limited evidence available does not suggest a policy of thoroughgoing reform. North Korea's history of central planning and the absence of any obvious blue print for how to proceed indicate that systemic reform is unlikely. Pyongyang appears likely to continue to hope that ad hoc changes, coupled with continued foreign aid and income generated from arms sales, tourism, and criminal activity, will be adequate to meet the country's needs. As for unification, although propaganda stresses using peaceful means, it also urges a united front between North and South Korea against the United States. An examination of the record of unification policy suggests that Pyongyang believes that South Korea's government enjoys no real popular support and is merely a U.S. puppet. With the United States out of the picture, North Korea thinks it could relatively easily bring about the collapse of the South Korean regime and unification under the auspices of Pyongyang through limited military acts.

It is unlikely that North Korea's current leaders, at least the highest echelon, have lost all hope and have fatalistically accepted that the end of the DPRK looms on the horizon. North Korea's rulers are influenced by history, ideology, and notions of nationalism that produce what social scientists like to term a "bounded rationality." The author's conclusion is that North Korea's senior leaders are determined and confident that they will not only survive but that they will be able to restore and revitalize their regime.

However, in the final analysis, insufficient data exist to say with absolute certainty what North Korea's strategic intentions are. Any one of these three "packages" outlined is plausible. Intentions could conceivably also fluctuate among the three, depending on how the regime assesses the situation at a particular point. The United States needs to probe and prod the Pyongyang regime to learn for sure; to keep an open mind and continually monitor what North Korea says, does, and prepares for. The United States should look for consistencies and inconsistencies. The distrust and suspicion are such that some intermediate confidence-building measures are necessary.

## NORTH KOREA'S STRATEGIC INTENTIONS

North Korea is probably the most mysterious and inaccessible country in the world today. Officially known as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), the Pyongyang regime is headed by perhaps the most mercurial and enigmatic political leader alive. No prominent figure of the early 21st century has been more reviled by Americans or considered more dangerous to the United States—with the possible exception of Saddam Hussein and Osama Bin Laden—than Kim Jong Il.<sup>1</sup> The regime Kim leads is generally considered to be one of the most repressive in existence, with a vast gulag, a massive security apparatus, and an extensive system of controls. Despite the facade of a powerful party-state possessing an enormous military, the North Korean economy is in shambles, hundreds of thousands of its people are living either as refugees in China or as displaced persons inside their own country, and as many as three and a half million people have died from starvation and related diseases.<sup>2</sup>

Pyongyang is one of only two surviving members of the exclusive Axis of Evil club identified by President George W. Bush in January 2002. Topping the U.S. list of concerns about North Korea is its nuclear program—Washington is extremely alarmed not only that Pyongyang is developing a nuclear capability for its own use, but also proliferating nuclear material and technology. But the United States and other countries are also concerned about other weapons of mass destruction (WMD) that North Korea possesses, as well as its ballistic missile program. Moreover, North Korea's conventional military forces are sizeable with significant capabilities and confront the armed forces of the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the United States across the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ).

### APPROACH

This monograph analyzes the North Korean regime's strategic intentions and motivations. I use the term "North Korean regime" to refer to the highest echelon of the power structure in Pyongyang—Kim Jong Il and his senior associates.<sup>3</sup> Subsequent monographs will

strategic assessments of North Korea. Furthermore, this approach will identify the fundamental assumptions that each analyst makes in his/her treatment of North Korea.

THE SPECTRUM OF EXPERT VIEWS  
OF NORTH KOREA’S INTENTIONS

Perhaps the most significant difference among the six analysts is in their assessments of the likelihood that the regime will moderate its policies. By moderate, I mean pursue economic reforms, reduce defense spending, and improve relations with perceived adversaries, notably the United States. Assessments range from a belief that Pyongyang is already in the process of moderating at one extreme to the belief that Pyongyang will never moderate at the other. The key variable is motivation—what drives the regime? Motivation, however, is a difficult dimension to identify and gauge.

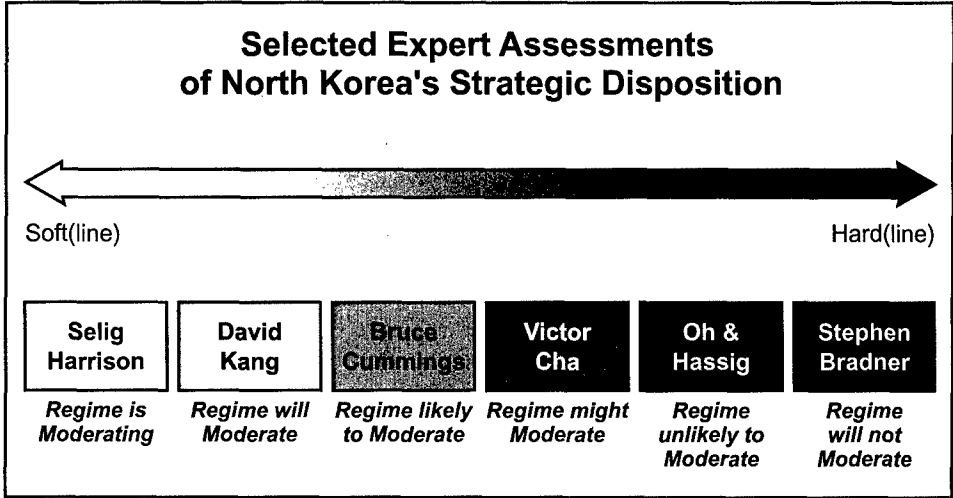


Figure 1.

Selig Harrison: *Regime Is Moderating.*

Selig Harrison is a long time observer and writer on the subject of North Korea who has visited the country at least six times (1972, 1987, 1992, 1994, 1996, and 2005). Of the six analysts under review, he is the



from overwhelming U.S. might. The purpose of its sizeable military machine is "deterrence and defense" against the United States.<sup>13</sup> Kang insists that the regime wants to moderate and will do so under the proper conditions. These conditions are predicated on the United States taking a less hostile and threatening approach to North Korea.<sup>14</sup>

Kang argues that for 4 decades following the Korean War, North Korea remained in a "holding pattern" with "minor changes" in foreign policy and no reform.<sup>15</sup> But in recent years the regime has pursued a "cautious and tentative" opening in economic and diplomatic spheres.<sup>16</sup> If the perceived threat from the United States diminishes, then Pyongyang will more vigorously pursue economic reforms. Kang argues that it is "highly unlikely that North Korea currently retains such aggressive intentions [i.e., plans to invade South Korea] in any serious way."<sup>17</sup>

### **Bruce Cumings: *Regime Likely to Moderate.***

Bruce Cummings is the most renowned historian of modern Korea, and his prolific publications include a two-volume history on the origins of the Korean War. While he is routinely considered pro-Pyongyang in his views, this characterization is inaccurate. Although Cumings does tend to be somewhat sympathetic to North Korea, he is certainly no apologist for the regime. Indeed, Cumings is clear-eyed about the horrors of the system, openly critical of it, and not sanguine in his assessments of the current situation. He contends that Pyongyang is "neither muddling through . . . nor is it seriously reforming like China and Vietnam." He laments that, during the past decade, the system was beset by "paralysis and immobilism."<sup>18</sup> North Korea, he says, is "the most astounding garrison state in the world" and "deeply insecure, threatened by the world around it." Precisely because of this insecurity, Cumings—like David Kang—argues that the regime "projects a fearsome image."<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, he seems to believe that the regime would likely moderate if the United States eased its hawkish approach. Cumings appears to suggest that Pyongyang has given up on unification and desires "peaceful coexistence with the South."<sup>20</sup>

the regime rather than part of any thoroughgoing reform effort.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, Pyongyang almost certainly will not agree to give up completely its nuclear program or negotiate away other WMD or missile programs because "military strength" is seen as vital to ensuring the survival of the regime.<sup>24</sup> The regime, Oh and Hassig argue, has not given up on attaining unification on its terms and, under certain circumstances, could possibly launch an attack across the DMZ.<sup>25</sup>

### **Stephen Bradner: *Regime Will Not Moderate.***

Stephen Bradner is a veteran analyst of North Korean security affairs who has served for many years as special advisor to the Commander of U.S. Forces in Korea. The most hawkish of the analysts reviewed here, he argues that the likelihood of North Korea moderating is virtually nil. Bradner asserts that Pyongyang is tightly and brutally controlled by one kinship group—what he calls the Kim Family Regime. This regime is single-minded in its determination to unify the Korea Peninsula on its own terms.

Despite the severe economic difficulties North Korea has faced over the past decade and a half, Bradner contends that the regime has not scaled back its goals nor curbed its ambitious plans. Pyongyang is focused single-mindedly on maintaining a powerful military to the detriment of all else ("maximizing its military power").<sup>26</sup> North Korea's leaders will never give up their WMD or missile programs.<sup>27</sup> "They will not reform," although the regime "may cautiously hazard some limited experimentation."<sup>28</sup> Instead Pyongyang's leaders will likely continue to pursue an "aid-based strategy" of accepting or extorting handouts from foreign governments and nongovernment organizations (NGOs), pending the achievement of their ultimate goal.<sup>29</sup> North Korea's leadership believes the road to its unification goal leads through military preparedness and defeating the enemy.

According to Bradner, Pyongyang recognizes that the troops of the United States and ROK Combined Forces Command constitute a formidable and determined foe. Its strategy is to weaken its adversary through undermining and eventually breaking the alliance.<sup>30</sup> The goal is to bring about the withdrawal from South Korea of U.S.

or overthrow of the regime. The clearest indication of this fear and the existence of this logic in the north is that, for more than half a century, Pyongyang has not launched an attack southward across the DMZ. In other words, the presence of U.S. Forces in Korea (USFK) immediately below the DMZ appears to have deterred North Korea. Pyongyang's leaders know that from the very start of any attack on South Korea, they would be battling U.S. military forces and be at war with the United States.<sup>36</sup> In short, deterrence seems to have worked.

Third, North Korea's rulers—or at least some of them—appear to be acutely aware of the dilemma they face. On the one hand, they seem to recognize that, on the surface of it, the most logical way to rescue their economy is to adopt thoroughgoing reforms. On the other, they seem to realize that pursuing such a course is likely to mean that they would be undermining their positions in the process—threatening their own power and control. Such reforms might be so successful that after gathering momentum, the regime would eventually find itself reformed out of existence. Because North Korea's leaders fear this would be the outcome, they are reluctant to move down what they view as the slippery slope of reform.<sup>37</sup> Of course, the alternative—to undertake little or no reform—is just as problematic. Without significant reform, North Korea's leaders realize they are probably condemning their regime to the ash heap of history. In short, they are damned if they do and damned if they don't. Pyongyang is probably more fearful of initiating change than it fears will spiral out of control than it is of doing little or nothing.

## STRATEGIC INTENTIONS

After surveying the range of expert views about North Korean thinking, what can one now say about the strategic intentions of Pyongyang's leaders? In the absence of access to internal documents and interviews with key North Korean policymakers, one cannot say with certainty. Yet on the basis of the assessments of North Korea reviewed above, it seems prudent to narrow the range of possibilities to three alternatives for the thrust of North Korean strategic intentions: modest/security, ambitious/benevolent, or ambitious/malevolent (see Figure 2).

### **Ambitious/Benevolent.**

The second package of intentions is a driving desire to maintain a strong, independent, and autonomous North Korea. Pyongyang would still need to conquer its siege mentality, but confidence-building measures might increase trust. This alternative would entail Pyongyang making peace with its long time adversaries in Seoul and Washington. North Korea would also desire to undertake thoroughgoing economic reforms and become an integral part of the global economic system. It would be prepared cautiously but purposefully to reduce—but probably not give up—its massive military through arms control efforts—conventional, WMD, missiles, and personnel—while seeking ways to guarantee North Korea's security. This represents an extremely ambitious but peaceful and defensive strategy. Harrison and Kang would certainly concur with most elements of this set of intentions, and Cumings, Cha, and Oh and Hassig would likely be prepared to entertain this possibility.

### **Ambitious/Malevolent.**

The third possible set of North Korean strategic intentions is ambitious but extremely aggressive. In this option, Pyongyang has not given up on the conquest of South Korea through violence and/or deceit: unification on North Korea's terms. In this scenario, North Korean leaders would not be seeking merely to protect themselves and deter a possible attack by the United States and/or ROK. Rather, Pyongyang would desire to possess the conventional and unconventional capabilities to topple Seoul by force and deception. For this set of intentions, nuclear weapons and other WMD are essential offensive or at least coercive weapons, and North Korea will never give them up. Pyongyang would not see an urgent need to repair its deplorable economy, because it views the current priority as maintaining a military capable of attacking the forces of the United States and South Korea. In other words, North Korea has a wartime economy and rather than be diverted from its consuming focus of military preparedness, Pyongyang intends to sustain itself in the interim by extorting aid and revenue by whatever means necessary

Korea.<sup>41</sup> Kang argues that “the flurry of North Korean diplomatic and economic activities in the past few years show that the North Korean leadership is actively pursuing a strategy they hope will ease their domestic problems.” While Kang argues that there is “little evidence that North Korea is backed into a corner” and the regime has “not given up hope,” Pyongyang, nevertheless, does appear to believe that urgent measures are necessary according to Kang.<sup>42</sup>

But what if North Korea’s rulers do not have all the facts? And what, even if they have “all the facts” or at least most of them, they remain convinced of the superiority of their own system and confident in their ultimate victory? My own conclusion is that North Korea’s senior leaders are determined and confident that they will not only survive, but that they will be able to restore and revitalize their regime. While most agree that they possess a siege mentality, they are not defeatists and retain a high degree of self-confidence, if not outright arrogance. Kim and other leaders are not crazy or irrational but they are almost certainly extremely ambitious. Kang argues “the North Korean leadership—far from having lost all hope and going into a bunker mentality—has been actively pursuing a number of options through which it can survive into the future.”<sup>43</sup> Madeleine Albright remarked that when she met with Kim Jong Il in Pyongyang in November 2000, he “seemed confident”; he certainly “didn’t seem a desperate or even worried man.”<sup>44</sup> If this reasoning is correct, it rules out option #1. But beyond the likely strong desire to persevere and reenergize the DPRK, what can one say about North Korean intentions with a high degree of confidence? To address this question one needs to look closely at observable manifestations.

## **PROPAGANDA, POLICY, AND PLANNING**

What are the observable manifestations that would indicate which of the three sets of strategic intentions North Korea is pursuing? There are three kinds of manifestations: (1) propaganda, (2) policy, and (3) planning. Each will be examined with regard to four areas: general intentions, security intentions, economic intentions, and intentions regarding unification.

the flow of people and gifts are used by the regime to demonstrate that North Korea is a powerful and respected country. Of course there is a paradox: on the one hand, veneration and tribute from foreigners is seen as positive, but at the same time, *Juche* represents a "xenophobic nationalism" that teaches North Koreans to be wary and suspicious of foreigners.<sup>50</sup>

Third, for *Juche* to be validated, the regime must be seen to keep the country strong and continue to make at least token efforts toward unification. This requires staunch political "independence" (or *chaju*), "self-defense" (or *chawi*), and economic "self-sustenance" (or *charip*).<sup>51</sup> Kim Jong Il's primary theme has become *kangsongtaeguk*.<sup>52</sup> This slogan translates as "strong development, powerful country." How does the regime ensure a strong and powerful country? Unifying the peninsula would seem to be the strongest guarantee. How can the regime justify the continued sacrifices it asks of its citizens? These are rationalized as only temporary. The implicit logic is North Korea must maintain a strong military while enduring temporary economic hardships, pending unification of the Koreas. The stress on achieving "a unified, self-reliant, independent state free of foreign interference" is traceable back to pre-Korean War speeches given by Kim Il Sung.<sup>53</sup> Pyongyang believes that realization of unification will ensure a powerful independent country with a revitalized economy.

*Rhetoric.* Although the words in public pronouncements, official documents, and news releases are invariably propaganda, they can reflect actual thinking, reveal key trends, and indicate significant changes. While bluster, threat, and hyperbole are staples of North Korean documents and pronouncements, if examined methodically, they can provide insights or at least hints of regime intentions. These include the various versions of the DPRK's constitution, party documents, major editorials in the most prominent publications, and the text of public statements by senior officials. For the purposes of this analysis, I will limit my examination to four key items: the 1998 state constitution, the 2000 Inter-Korean summit news release, the five most recent New Year's editorials (2001-05) jointly published in the three leading newspapers (*Nodong Sinmun*, *Joseoninmingun*, and *Chongnyonjonwi*), the statements made following each of the three rounds of Six Party Talks held in Beijing in 2003 and 2004 (April 23-25, 2003; August 27-29, 2003; and February 25-28, 2004), and the

U.S. troops out of south Korea [and thereby] remove the very source of a nuclear war." The January 2004 editorial pledged Pyongyang's commitment "to seek a negotiated peaceful solution to the nuclear issue between the DPRK and the U.S." This statement underscored the statement of a DPRK Foreign Ministry spokesman 4 months earlier on August 30, 2003, following the conclusion of the second round of the Six Party Talks. He said: "The DPRK made clear its consistent stand on the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula." The DPRK spokesman ridiculed the U.S. insistence on "complete, verifiable, and irreversible dismantlement" of Pyongyang's nuclear program. If Washington would only take positive steps to improve relations after North Korea had disarmed:

This means that the U.S. is asking the DPRK to drop its gun first, saying it would not open fire, when both side[s] are leveling guns at each other. How can the DPRK trust the U.S. and drop its gun? Even a child would not be taken in by such a trick. What we want is for both side[s] to drop guns at the same time and co-exist peacefully.

The spokesman then went on to state that as a result of the U.S. position, Pyongyang had concluded: "that there is no other option for us but to further increase the nuclear deterrent force as a self-defensive measure to protect our sovereignty." The same February 10, 2005, Foreign Ministry statement announcing an "indefinite" suspension of North Korea's participation in the Six Party Talks also declared that Pyongyang possessed "manufactured nuclear weapons." The statement concluded by insisting that North Korea, nevertheless, remained committed to "the ultimate goal of denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula."

The 2003 and 2002 New Year's editorials were somewhat more strident, emphasizing North Korea's "military-based policy" and echoing the language of the 2001 New Year's editorial. The January 2001 joint editorial was very clear: "The policy of giving priority to the army is the permanent strategic objective in the present-time." The 2004 editorial notes that the SPA "strengthened" the political system by enhancing the "exceptionally high . . . authority" of the National Defense Commission "to meet the requirements of the *Songun* era."

But the most prominent item is the "North-South Joint Declaration" issued by ROK President Kim Dae Jung and Kim Jong Il on June 15, 2000, at the conclusion of their summit in Pyongyang. The document highlights the common aspiration of both Pyongyang and Seoul as "peaceful unification." The declaration notes that proposals put forward by both sides for reunification "have elements in common." The final sentence of the joint declaration states that President Kim invited his North Korean counterpart to visit Seoul, and Kim Jong Il "agreed to visit . . . at an appropriate time in the future."

All five of the most recent joint New Year's Day editorials stress the continued significance of the "June 15 North-South Joint Declaration." The January 2005 editorial states: "This year is a significant year which marks the 5th anniversaries of the historic Pyongyang meeting [between Kim Dae Jung and Kim Jong Il]." The editorial gives the slogan for the year: "Let's advance holding high the flag of cooperation for national independence, cooperation for peace . . . and cooperation for reunification and patriotism!" It further opines: "It is unbearable shame on the nation that the sovereignty has been infringed upon for more than 100 years in . . . half of the country due to the 60-year-long presence of . . . U.S. troops in the wake of the Japanese imperialists' colonial rule that lasted for over 100 years."

The main barrier to unification is routinely identified as the United States. According to the 2003 editorial: "It can be said that there exists on the Korean Peninsula at present only confrontation between the Koreans in the north and south and the United States." The editorial urges Washington to ". . . stop its provocative military pressure and withdraw their aggression forces from South Korea without delay." According to the 2005 editorial: "All Koreans should stage a powerful struggle for peace against war in order to drive the U.S. troops out of South Korea, remove the very source of nuclear war, and defend the peace and security on the Korean Peninsula."

An analysis of North Korean ideology and rhetoric doesn't give a clear indication of which package (#1, #2, or #3) would be selected. One point does seem very clear: an unrelenting focus on maintaining a robust conventional national defense capability and building a nuclear capacity.



constant subjection to nuclear blackmail for decades.<sup>58</sup> North Korea has had a nuclear program since the 1950s, although reportedly efforts at weaponization did not get underway until the late 1970s.<sup>59</sup> North Korea has also had a vigorous cruise and ballistic missile program for decades, producing both for deployment at home and sale abroad. Evidence strongly suggests that Pyongyang also has exported nuclear technology and material, with the primary impetus being entrepreneurial. Most recently, in February 2005 there were claims that North Korea provided processed uranium to Libya.<sup>60</sup>

*Economy.* North Korea has a long history of heavy-handed central control of the economy. Since 1954 Pyongyang has pursued economic development through multiyear state plans—of 3, 5, 6, and 7-year durations.<sup>61</sup> This policy proclivity has eased only slightly in recent years and is unlikely to undergo dramatic reform any time soon. While the constitution was amended in 1998 to allow for consideration of “profit” and the establishment of “special economic zones,” remarkably little actual policy follow through has occurred. One example is that, while a law on foreign investment was passed in 1984, for over a decade there was very little actual foreign investment or even serious attempts to attract foreign investment. Still, in recent years Pyongyang has stepped up efforts to attract foreign investment and capital in special zones but with modest and disappointing results. The first attempt was the Rajin-Sonbong Zone in the northeast of the country in the Tumen River border region.<sup>62</sup> The second effort was the establishment of a foreign investment zone at Kaesong on the western edge of the DMZ, and the third effort was the Mount Kumgang Tourist venture located east of Pyongyang near the eastern end of the DMZ. Neither investment zone has attracted the volume of investment hoped for, but at least the latter has had limited success, while the former appears to be languishing.<sup>63</sup> However, the Mount Kumgang tourist project has been the most lucrative of all. Under the terms of the agreement, Hyundai guaranteed North Korea US\$940 million in exchange for permitting South Korean tourists to visit the scenic mountain. Since 1998 hundreds of thousands of tourists have visited the locale.<sup>64</sup>

Domestic economic reforms have been jerky and uncoordinated, with limited and sometimes contradictory results. In recent years the authorities have permitted farmers’ markets to operate, and in July

the German Democratic Republic (GDR) Lee Chang Su and GDR officials. According to documents discovered in the archives of the now defunct East German regime, Lee told East German leaders that the declaration was actually a tactical ploy.<sup>70</sup>

This ruse is consistent with other information we know about North Korean diplomatic initiatives. Admiral C. Turner Joy, chief negotiator for the United Nations (UN) Command at the truce talks at Panmunjom, noted the efforts of Pyongyang officials to use every ruse possible to promote their overarching goals. Negotiating, in short, is not seen as a substitute for military options, but rather another arena of battle.<sup>71</sup>

Advocating confederation did not preclude North Korea from pursuing nearly simultaneous violent and subversive efforts against South Korea. These initiatives include assassination attempts against the ROK's most senior leaders in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s; elaborate tunnels dug under the DMZ; and acts of terrorism. North Korean special forces infiltrated Seoul and came close to penetrating the Blue House (the residence of South Korea's president) perimeter in January 1968 before they were detected and defeated. In August 1974 another attempt to assassinate President Park Chung Hee failed, but the would-be assassin did kill South Korea's first lady. In October 1983, a bombing in Rangoon, Burma, killed 17 South Korean government officials, including 4 cabinet ministers. But perhaps the most horrifying act of terrorism carried out by North Korea was the bombing of Korean Air Lines Flight 858 in November 1987 that killed all 115 passengers and crew on board. The infiltration of special operations forces into South Korea continued into the 1990s, as the discovery of North Korean submarines and commandos attest.

As noted earlier, Pyongyang's more recent high profile claim to be pursuing a policy of peaceful unification was made at the 2000 Inter-Korean summit. The summit and related North Korean diplomatic charm offensive reflect that Pyongyang has become savvier and more adept at utilizing diplomacy over the decades. Since the early 1990s, North Korea has engaged in unprecedented waves of diplomatic activity: establishing diplomatic relations with a cluster of states, joining the UN, and participating in a variety of multilateral fora, including the Six Party Talks with South Korea, China, Russia, Japan, and the United States in Beijing. However, in

any evident willingness to downsize the massive military. The KPA continues to maintain cordial, if rather superficial and symbolic, relations with the militaries of China, Russia, Vietnam, and Cuba. North Korean officers continue to take specially tailored short courses at Chinese institutions of professional military education but are isolated from Chinese and other foreign students.<sup>74</sup>

*Economics.* Economics is the one major area under review where considerable evidence suggests that North Korea is actively contemplating experimentation and innovation. Nevertheless, there is no evidence of plans for radical reform of the central planning system. The highest levels seem reluctant to make such a dramatic break. The regime fears it will lose control. This concern is probably strongest among the economic planning bureaucracy which fears that major steps in this direction would threaten its own power and influence.

Ongoing foreign study tours and training programs for officials provide perhaps the best indicators that the regime is seriously contemplating significant changes in economic policy. According to Kang, in 2001 alone "more than 480 [officials] visited China, Australia, Italy, and Sweden."<sup>75</sup> Field trips of note since then have included China, Vietnam, and Russia, and training programs on economic related subjects for DPRK personnel at universities in China, Australia, and the United States.<sup>76</sup>

Other evidence consists of efforts to open new special economic zones. In 2002 North Korea sought to establish a new zone at Sinuiju on the northwest border with China. In an unprecedented move, Pyongyang appointed a Dutch-Chinese entrepreneur, Yang Bin, to direct the zone. Little indicates that the initiative was well-conceived or planned. Soon after, Yang was arrested in China, charged with various crimes, and sentenced to 18 years in prison.<sup>77</sup> The zone has since failed to make significant progress.

Further evidence suggests that North Korea's leaders are very keen on pursuing high tech projects, especially in the field of information technology (IT). Pyongyang apparently has a small but vigorous IT sector. In the late 1990s, it reportedly developed an award winning computer game, and in 2002 embarked on its first Internet joint venture with a South Korean firm.<sup>78</sup> These are very small steps,

## **Ambitious Benevolence: Cautious Optimism?**

A careful analysis of propaganda makes it a conceivable possibility that Pyongyang's intentions are focused in the direction of arms control, a policy of economic reform and opening, and pursuing some form of peaceful confederation with Seoul. Pyongyang propaganda insists that North Korea seeks a peaceful negotiated settlement of the nuclear issue and is committed to the denuclearization of the peninsula.<sup>81</sup> However, actual Pyongyang policies and planning do not seem to bear this out. When one remembers that the most consistent strand of North Korea's propaganda continues to be the essential need for military strength and the "military first" policy, then a healthy dose of skepticism emerges. Moreover, evidence from planning is unclear, so overall the data remain inconclusive.

## **Ambitious Malevolence: Reluctant Pessimism.**

There is a real possibility that North Korea's key strategic goals are to build up its WMD programs, engage in parasitic extortionism, and pursue unification by force or coercion. According to Pyongyang's propaganda, maintaining its military strength is the regime's foremost priority. This is born out by examinations of implemented policy, planning, and ruminations about the future. As for the economy, while propaganda has made vague claims about redoubling efforts to improve economic performance, very limited evidence suggests policies of thoroughgoing reform. North Korea's history of central planning and the absence of any obvious blue print for how to proceed suggest that systemic reform is unlikely. Pyongyang appears likely to continue to hope that ad hoc changes, coupled with continued foreign aid and income generated from arms sales, tourism, and criminal activity, will be adequate to meet the country's needs. As for unification, propaganda, although it stresses using peaceful means to unification, also urges a united front between North and South Korea against the United States. Statements continue to call for the withdrawal of U.S. forces from South Korea. An examination of the record of unification policy suggests that Pyongyang believes that South Korea's government enjoys no real popular support and

4. This manuscript has benefited from careful readings by some very knowledgeable people, including Guy Arrigoni, Don Boose, Ralph Hassig, Jiyul Kim, Katy Oh, and Dwight Raymond. It should be noted these individuals do not necessarily agree with all of the analysis or findings presented herein. Moreover, any errors or leaps are solely the responsibility of the author.

5. However, the list of experts should not be considered exhaustive and does not include everyone researching and writing on North Korea. Moreover the sample does not include specialists primarily focused on the North Korean economy (e.g., Nicholas Eberstadt), military (e.g., Joseph Bermudez), foreign relations (Samuel Kim), or history (Charles Armstrong).

6. All the analysts listed in the text appear hold both the former and the latter views. The distaste for the repressive Pyongyang regime is also evident in the writings from analysts often considered sympathetic to the North Korea system. Bruce Cumings, for example, calls the regime an "abhorrent family dictatorship" and places blame for the "truly inexcusable . . . suffering of the North Korea people" squarely on its shoulders. See Bruce Cumings, *North Korea: Another Country*, New York: The New Press, 2004, pp. 207, 189. David Kang says "the regime's actions are abhorrent and morally indefensible." See Victor Cha and David Kang, *Nuclear North Korea: A Debate About Engagement Strategies*, New York: Columbia University, 2003, p. 46.

7. Harrison, *Korean Endgame*, p. 25.

8. These quotes come from *Ibid.*, pp. xxi, 6, and 26, respectively.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 139-140.

10. *Ibid.*, pp 75-78.

11. *Ibid.*, p. xxi.

12. David Kang, "North Korea: Deterrence Through Danger," in Muthiah Alagappa, ed., *Asian Security Practice: Material and Ideational Influences*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998, p. 263.

13. Kang in Victor Cha and David Kang, *Nuclear North Korea*, p. 43.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 119.

15. Kang, "North Korea," p. 240.

16. Kang in Cha and Kang, *Nuclear North Korea*, p. 114.

17. Kang, "North Korea," p. 236.

18. Cumings, *North Korea*, p. 184.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 151.

20. Cumings quotes with apparent approval the conclusions of Anthony Namkung. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

21. Cha in Cha and Kang, *Nuclear North Korea*, p. 21.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

46. Suh, *Kim Il Sung*, p. 305.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 305.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 304.
49. Nicholas Eberstadt, *The End of North Korea*, Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1999, p. 19, and chapter 5.
50. Suh, *Kim Il Sung*, p. 313.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 302.
52. See for example, Armstrong, "Inter-Korean Relations," p. 46.
53. See August 1947 speech quoted by Bruce Cumings, "The Corporate State in North Korea," in Hagen Koo, ed., *State and Society in Contemporary Korea*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993, p. 215.
54. Inter-University Associates, Inc., "Introductory and Comparative Notes," in *Democratic People's Republic of Korea*, Gisbert H. Flanz, ed., *Constitutions of the Countries of the World*, Vol. X: Release 99-7 Issued November 1999, Dobbs Ferry, NY: Oceana Publications Inc., 1999, p. v.
55. The New Year's joint editorials were accessed in the archives of Pyongyang's Korean Central News Agency located at [www.kcna.co.jp](http://www.kcna.co.jp). The 2005 editorial is at [www.kcna.co.jp/item/2005/20050](http://www.kcna.co.jp/item/2005/20050). The editorial for 2004 can be found at [www.kcna.co.jp/item/2004/200401/news01/01.htm](http://www.kcna.co.jp/item/2004/200401/news01/01.htm); the 2003 at [www.kcna.co.jp/item/2003/200301/news01/01.htm](http://www.kcna.co.jp/item/2003/200301/news01/01.htm); a summary of the 2002 editorial is available at [www.kcna.co.jp/item/2002/200201/news01/01.htm](http://www.kcna.co.jp/item/2002/200201/news01/01.htm), while the full text was accessed via the Foreign Broadcast Information System (FBIS), and the 2001 at [www.kcna.co.jp/item/2001200101/news01/01.htm](http://www.kcna.co.jp/item/2001200101/news01/01.htm).
56. Democratic People's Republic of Korea Foreign Ministry Statement (in Korean) carried by *Pyongyang Central Broadcasting Station*, February 10, 2005 and translated by FBIS.
57. Adrian Buzo, *Guerilla Dynasty: Politics and Leadership in North Korea*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999.
58. For example, North Korea appears convinced that the United States used biological weapons in the Korean War. Although Washington certainly considered the use of such weapons, all the evidence to date indicates that it refrained from doing so. Nevertheless, the belief that the United States did remains strong. The belief is perpetuated by slap dash Western scholars who assert myth as fact. See, for example, Harrison, *Korean Endgame*, pp. 9-10. For a noble effort to set the record straight, see Conrad C. Crane, "Chemical and Biological Warfare During the Korean War: Rhetoric and Reality," *Asian Perspective*, Vol. 25, No. 3, 2001, pp. 61-84.
59. Alexandre Y. Mansurov, "The Origins, Evolution, and Current Politics of the North Korean Nuclear Program," *The Nonproliferation Review*, Vol. 2, No. 23, Spring-Summer 1995, pp. 25-26.
60. David E. Sanger and William J. Broad, "Test Said to Tie Deal on Uranium to North Korea," *New York Times*, February 2, 2005; Glenn Kessler, "North Korea may Have Sent Libya Nuclear Material, US Tells Allies," *Washington Post*, February 2,

76. Author conversations with analysts in China and Vietnam in November 2004; Kang in Cha and Kang, *Nuclear North Korea*, p. 116.

77. Andrew Scobell, *China and North Korea: From Comrades-in-Arms to Allies at Arm's Length*, Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War, College Strategic Studies Institute, March 2004, p. 8.

78. Nina Hachigan, "The Internet and Power in One-Party Asian States," *Washington Quarterly*, No. 25, Summer 2002, pp. 44-45; Sonni Efron, "Computer Chips Stacked to Master Japanese Chess," *Los Angeles Times*, August 19, 1999; and "North Korean Launches High-Tech Venture," *ibid.*, April 1, 2002.

79. See, for example, "Seoul to Finish S-N Railroad by December," *Korea Times*, February 24, 2005.

80. Kang in Cha and Kang, *Nuclear North Korea*, p. 116.

81. North Korean Foreign Ministry statement of February 10, 2005.

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